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Consultation Examines Deeper
Involvement of Laymen in SBC

NASHVILLE (BP)--More than 300 Southern Baptists attending a national consultation on lay utilization grappled for nearly three days with how to involve more laymen at a deeper level in the work of Baptist churches and the denomination, sharing their findings with a committee appointed by the Southern Baptist Executive Committee to study the problems.

The conference participants divided up into 25 different small groups spending one day discussing specific areas of lay involvement. A summary of their discussions was fed into two findings committee which brought final reports to the entire group in the last session.

The two committees outlined 16 pages of suggestions on deeper involvement of laymen, but no action was taken by the consultation participants. Rather, the information was shared with the lay utilization committee appointed by the SBC Executive Committee which will study the findings and make later recommendations.

"This meeting has served well to begin the process of finding what laymen are thinking," concluded one of the two findings committees in its report. "The suggestions are somewhat tentative because of insufficient time both to incubate thought and to write. However, we believe this is a good first step toward what can be an exciting experience to utilize laymen in Kingdom work."

The findings committee suggested that similar meetings be held in the future, that more lay involvement was needed in the discussions, that more time was necessary, and that more young people should be included in future discussions.

The two findings committee reports offered suggestions on deeper involvement of Baptist laymen in six different areas--evangelism, the work of the denomination, improved relations between pastors and laymen, local church ministries, the life of the community, and in world missions.

Among the suggestions in six different areas included:

Evangelism--increased motivation among laymen for involvement in witnessing, greater awareness of witnessing opportunities, more effective approaches, leadership and training by pastors for laymen in evangelism, etc.

Denominational involvement--more attendance of laymen at Baptist conventions, education of laymen on the structure and functions of the denomination, more effective use of laymen on denominational committees and boards, financial help by churches for laymen to attend denominational meetings, better communication between the denomination and the laity, better ratios of laymen and pastors on denominational boards, agencies and committees, etc.

Lay-pastor relationships--laymen should develop better personal and social relationship with their pastors, laymen should help pastor perform pastoral ministries such as visiting, counseling, etc.; laymen should seek personal involvement in their churches; laymen should assume business and administrative responsibilities in the church, pastors should guard against professionalism; more information is needed among laymen concerning adequacy of compensation of ministers, laymen should be honest in dealing with pastors, and vice versa, etc.

Local church involvement--there is not a job in the church, including preaching, that the laymen cannot do; laymen should offer whatever services their training will provide to their churches; the pastor should learn the abilities of laymen and never underestimate them, etc.

Community involvement--laymen should participate in political action by nominating Christian candidates and supporting them; laymen should be involved in social service by helping others in the name of Christ; pastors should encourage laymen in these areas; denominational leaders should refrain from making public political utterances which seemingly speak for the denomination; etc.

Missions involvement--laymen should participate in mission projects and visit mission fields; laymen should become involved with nationals who work in the same professional fields; laymen should be more involved in the SBC Brotherhood program; a special mission offering by Baptist men and boys could finance mission projects by laymen and ministers; churches should be encouraged to have a staff member specializing in enlisting laymen to become involved and active in mission and outreach programs, etc.

One of the findings committees stated that their purpose was "to find more and better ways to allow and encourage the mighty laymen in Southern Baptist life to deploy their strength in Kingdom causes.

"The Baptist church and denomination is a layman-based organization and every layman should feel that he is needed and obligated to be an active, not simply a passive participant in the activities of his church," the committee said.

In the discussion of the finding committee summaries, a layman from Michigan, Prof. Charles A. Lassister of Michigan State University, said he felt this was an idealistic statement, but was not really correct in fact.

Others said that the denomination is dominated by pastors, and that laymen do not have a strong voice in decisions made by the denomination. "It seems to me," said one layman, "that pastors recommend laymen to (SBC) boards who won't rock the boat and ask embarrassing questions."

Throughout the discussion of the findings committee reports, there were continued comments about tensions between pastors and laymen, and what can be done to improve their relationships.

One layman told the group he was "astonished to find this undercurrent that there is a conflict between pastors and laymen. I decry this apparent falling out between laymen and preachers."

After a coffee break, an Alabama pastor remarked in later discussions that he was "sick" over the "low note that was sounded in the discussions earlier this morning," but remarked that he was pleased that the later session was "on a high plane."

Just after his remark, a layman from Washington, D.C., observed that he felt the second findings committee report "is worse than the one we heard earlier this morning...I don't know who censored this stuff and turned it into pabulum, but it (the report) certainly doesn't reflect the depth of the discussions we had in my group."

Another layman countered that "this conference resulted in a lot more than just what is in these reports. We as laymen ought to be pleased and appreciative that the leadership of the SBC has seen fit to have this conference in trying to better utilize laymen. I didn't get all the information on these sheets I'd like to have, but I'm sure it will come later."

Owen Cooper, layman from Yazoo City, Miss., and chairman of the SBC lay utilization study committee, explained that all of the remarks in the small groups, combined with the findings committee report, plus results of a questionnaire to all the conference participants would be shared with the entire committee as information on which to base some later recommendations to the SBC Executive Committee and the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Laymen Called Greatest Untapped
Resource In Southern Baptist Life

12/7/70

NASHVILLE (BP)--"Southern Baptist's greatest untapped resource is its laity," the director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board Division of Evangelism declared here at a national consultation on lay involvement in the Southern Baptist Convention.

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"The involvement of Baptist men in Southern Baptist efforts needs to be enlarged, broadened, and deepened, both drastically and immediately," stated Kenneth L. Chafin of Atlanta in the conference's opening session.

The denomination's national evangelism leader noted that it was ironic that laymen are not being fully utilized to their potential in the Southern Baptist Convention, because the SBC has a background of a "people's church--a lay denomination."

He cited three possible reasons for the lack of involvement of laymen in the denomination: (1) SBC leaders have underestimated the insights and abilities of the laity; (2) the SBC has not adopted a long range, comprehensive strategy for involving laymen; and (3) lack of an adequate platform in the SBC for harvesting the best insights and opinions of the laity.

Chafin said his office had been involved in conducting a four-week training program for layman and pastors in the area of evangelism, and that as a result he had concluded that most preachers do not understand the insights and thinking of the laity.

Too often, he observed, the men of the denomination are not challenged to do much more than just give financially. "There is more than a man can do in a church than just serve on the finance committee," he added.

"We must figure out ways to get more laymen involved in our local congregations at a deeper level. Not only the quantity, but the quality needs deepening," he said.

Chafin said that the goal of the denomination every year is to "see America won to Christ," but he added that "I've got a feeling we are not going to do it the way we are. The potential is there, if we could harness the vast potential of 11 1/2 million people. If we do not do it, it will be because the commitment is not there," he observed.

In a second speech to the conference, former Southern Baptist Convention President Wayne Dehoney, pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, told of the involvement of laymen in his own congregation as an example of how laymen can be involved.

"The problem is that in many churches, we've only thought in terms of laymen doing about three things--taking up an offering as an usher, teaching a Sunday School class, or praying in public," he observed.

"Somehow we've got to break through and say that we have all of these tremendous challenges of the day that somehow we ought to harness the church up to use the great resources of the laity in meeting these challenges," Dehoney said.

The Louisville pastor added that he felt the church of tomorrow will be a **changing** church that is willing to try new methods and change the attitudes of people, a **relevant** church that reaches the needs of people, a church built on lay involvement, a ministering church, and a witnessing church.

The conference concluded with an address by Owen Cooper, Baptist layman from Yazoo City, Miss., who said that Southern Baptists need to offer a big challenge to their laymen, rather than just giving them routine little jobs to do.

Cooper, president of the Mississippi Chemical Corp., said that there are more Baptist laymen out deer hunting in the fall than there are attending the Southern Baptist Convention in June, and that laymen have not sufficiently been challenged to be involved in the denomination.

He suggested that the SBC begin a mass circulation magazine similar to Readers Digest or Time to provide better communications with laymen, and suggested that a layman be invited to address the denomination's annual convention just as a pastor is invited each year to deliver the annual convention sermon.

He also suggested a bigger financial challenge to laymen, saying that if Southern Baptists sought to repeat the emphasis of their \$75 million campaign of 1919, the goal would need to be \$1 billion, \$200 million to be comparable in today's finances. "Yet we still think \$1 million is a big offering goal," he said.

Cooper said he strongly advocated lay participation in evangelistic crusades, "not because they do so much good, but because they do the guy who goes so much good."

Cooper, chairman of the lay utilization study committee appointed by the SBC Executive Committee which sponsored the national consultation, said that the meeting here was the first time the SBC had undertaken such a study, and that some things would have been different if they had an opportunity to do it again.

"But don't think for one moment that our time here has been in vain," he told the 208 laymen, 73 ministers, and 49 denominational workers attending the meeting. "I think this meeting has been tremendously significant and successful," Cooper said.

He added that summaries of all the group discussions during the meeting would be fed into the study of lay utilization and provide "ideas that will ultimately result in a more effective program" in Southern Baptist life."

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Congress Votes To Provide Family Planning Services

12/7/70

WASHINGTON (BP)--Both houses of Congress have agreed on a major national effort to provide family planning services for all persons who want and need them.

Under the measure, grants can be made both to public and nonprofit groups for research in birth control methods, training of personnel for family planning projects and for the distribution of birth control information and contraceptive devices. Priority for these grants will go to groups serving persons from low-income families.

The new bill, requested by the president and now awaiting his signature, authorizes \$387 million to be spent over the next three years. This amount represents a compromise between the Senate, which asked for \$967 million over a five-year period, and the House, which voted to spend \$267 million over three years.

The legislation, known as the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970, specifically prohibits the use of any of the funds in programs "where abortion is a method of family planning."

Many poor persons will benefit especially from the new legislation since the bill specifies that no charge will be made for services provided to those from a low-income family.

According to testimony heard last summer by the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee there are some five million American women of child-bearing age who want family planning information and do not have it.

The legislation would establish an Office of Population Affairs in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to coordinate federal family planning and research programs.

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